THE
MEADOWLARK
A newsletter for those involved with Wisconsin's Glacial Habitat Restoration Area
Volume 5, Issue 1 Spring/Summer 2004

2003 Summary Report

The Glacial Habitat Restoration Area (GHRA) saw another great year in our quest to restore habitat on a regional, landscape scale within the project area. Our goals of restoring approximately 10% of the destroyed grasslands and wetlands in the 24-township area, or 38,600 acres of grassland and 11,000 acres of wetland, are getting closer and closer every day.

This was a year that our local conservation partners as well as larger grant sources really stepped up to the plate and helped make the GHRA a better place for wildlife. With a pending 101-acre acquisition in peril, our local chapters of Pheasants Forever and Wings Over Wisconsin stepped in with additional funding to help seal the deal. As a result of this acquisition, not only will we be able to restore 60 acres of wetland and 40 acres of grassland, we are able to open up an additional 101 acres for everyone to enjoy.

This was not the only acquisition we did this past year. We added 650 acres of public property and 170 acres were put into easements with 860 additional acres in the appraisal or closing process. For the first time this year, the GHRA was able to tap into the Natural Resources Damage Assessment money, the money required from the companies along the Fox River for habitat protection, and add an additional 332 acres of easements. In addition, the Natural Resources Conservation Service has been a great partner, especially through the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), as we have partnered together and greatly increased the buying power of State Stewardship dollars. Through the WRP program, we were able to match state stewardship dollars and acquire a little over 100 acres with 391 additional acres in the works. Everything combined, the GHRA staff now manage 177 properties for a total of 13,490 acres.

Also, the Marshland Gobblers Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF), through their Superfund Program donated over $5,300 towards oak savanna and oak/hickory woodlot management. Over the years, a considerable number of unwanted tree species have invaded our woodlots and with this funding we have initiated timber stand improvement activities on over 40 acres on 8 different properties, with much more to follow.

In addition, 2003 is the first full year that we are able to take

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Mark your calendars . . .

April ~ May - Marsh Melodies. Fun weekend adventures await you at Horicon Marsh. Festivities are planned during the weekends beginning April 24 and continuing through May. For more information, or a complete schedule of events, contact 920-485-4663 or check out there website at www.marshmelodies.com.

August 8 ~ 12 - North American Prairie Conference. This years conference will be held in Madison, WI. Don't miss this great opportunity! Some great field trips are planned as well as the papers that will be presented. Visit their website for more information at www.napc2004.org

June 9 ~ Project Bluestem. Attention educators, this is a computer-based curriculum on prairies and savannas designed for elementary, middle school, and high school teachers, as well as non-formal educators. The curriculum helps educators teach prairie ecology and the science and art of grassland restoration. Join us in exploring our grassland world! For more information, contact Brenda Hill at 920-485-3007 or Laura Hartner at 920-485-3029.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Beginning again, on the prairie

by Pat Clark. Guest Writer

It's a new February day on yet another Glacial Habitat Restoration Project. A male marsh hawk hovers over an ancient drumlin covered in golden prairie grass and spent prairie flowers. His white body and black lined wings fold inward as he finds his talons plugging into fresh snows to find a morning meal of an awaken mouse.

A red tailed fox makes his daily rounds this time not in search of breakfast, but of a mate, who ignores his passionate pleas.

A covey of Wisconsin bobwhite quail huddle in their warming circular grouping under a fallen old oak. The early western wind wipes snow around them. The oak continues to give even upon falling.

A thicket of prairie cord grass draped in hedge bindweed acts as a winter hideout for a pair of chick-a-dees as they await the promise of spring.

These are the daily activities that are played out on the stage of Glacial Habitat Restoration Projects scattered over a twenty-four-township area in South Central Wisconsin. Their old traditions acted out on relatively new prairie lands and they're accompanying wetlands and oak savannas. These lands have in fact been reborn. Reborn from drained wetlands that were gifts from a long ago glacier. Reborn from worn-out mortgage filled farm fields. Reborn from fenced in pastures that held black and white buffalo.

Now these Wisconsin acres grow what man could not. Those things of balance, harmony, solitude and those things felt on a chilled February eve. What started from scratch now encompasses some 12,000 acres of restored prairie landscape. With a small-dedicated group of restoration experts and their staff, life has been breathed into the Wisconsin prairie.

To what end? That future generations will look upon the beauty of the prairie, understand it's soil building function, that our very culture is woven of prairie fabric and that a small group of people had the vision to restore it. Through the ebb and flow of the human cycle, these areas will give people a sense of permanence.

The Meadowlark is published bi-annually by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Program. Its purpose is to provide information about the Department's Glacial Habitat Restoration Area (GHRA). Unless noted, material in this newsletter is not copyrighted. Reproduction for educational purposes is encouraged. Subscriptions are free. Refer to Publication number WM-349-04.

GHRA Online: http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife

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WILDLIFE RESTORATION
Federal Aid Project
funded by your purchase of
hunting equipment

Summary Report *Continued from page 1*

advantage of the $1,000,000 North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant that we received at the very end of 2002. This funding is a lifeline for the GHRA and funds many of the activities that are so important to wildlife conservation, in particular wetland restoration. We were able to fill our Wetland Habitat Coordinator position that had been vacant a little over a year. This position is completely funded through our NAWCA Phase IV grant and as a result is dependent on continued external funding sources. Angie Rusch, who we introduced to you in our last newsletter has successfully restored 22.5 acres of wetland and is developing plans for many additional sites. Anybody with restoration potential should contact Angie at (920) 485-3011 as our grant expires on October 18th and more sites are always welcome!

Not only are we getting somewhere on our wetland goals, but we also were able to plant 412 acres of grassland habitat. Although our planting acreage is down from previous years, we made great headway in controlling the invasive and noxious weeds in previous year's plantings by doing maintenance mowings on an additional 1,160 grassland acres. Combine these numbers with the 700 acres that we burned on 46 burn units this last year, and we have dramatically improved the grassland habitat for a whole variety of bird species.

Education was an important component last year for the GHRA as well. Sixteen teachers attended a training workshop taught by staff to bring the prairies and oak savannas to the classroom. The Project Bluestem curriculum has learning activities that reach grade levels from kindergarten through high school. A strong philosophy to conserving and restoring our prairies is through education, both young and old. Plans are already underway to offer another workshop in June.

The holidays are a time for giving and since one of our parcels had a small stand of conifers that were producing artificially higher populations of numerous predatory species, it was decided that they should be removed. Typically, trees slated for removal are chemically treated and cut, sold as firewood or become included within the perimeter of a prescribed fire. Sealing their fate, social services from Beaver Dam was contacted and an effort was organized to have families meet on site and learn about the GHRA and to offer them a traditional opportunity. With saws in hand they walked through the trees, looking for the perfect one. You could hear laughter and you could see only smiling faces. Families left that day with good spirits, a holiday tree and a lasting memory. Social Services thanked us and commented, "this spirit of generosity and going the extra mile brightens all of us and brings hope to those we serve."

Looking back, it was a great year but there is much yet to be done. We have about 40% of our overall habitat goals to meet and a considerably higher percentage of our acquisition goals. The future ahead looks questionable from a state-funding standpoint, with the wildlife feeling the majority of the crunch. The partnerships that we have bonded will become increasingly more important and many new opportunities will need to develop.

Thanks again to all of those that stepped up and gave a helping hand, the WDNR staff and the wildlife of the area greatly appreciate it. *

GHRA Species Profile

The American Badger

Scientifically named *Taxidea taxus*, the American Badger is a member of the weasel family, the state animal of Wisconsin, and our famous mascot for the UW football team. Wisonsin is the Badger State!

Badgers are the size of a medium-sized dog, the male being larger than the female. Their long front claws allow for quick digging and also defending themselves. When retracting from an enemy, they back into a burrow so their teeth and claws are ready to defend and their soft parts are protected. A tough hide and elastic skin offer protective "armor" from larger animals. When threatened, badgers can emit a very strong foul scent from glands under their tail. However, unlike skunks, they cannot throw the scent. Badgers are chiefly nocturnal (active at night), but are sometimes active during daytime too. They live on average of 4-5 years.

Badgers live in open grasslands, sandy fields, and pastures. They dig a burrow 8-30 feet long which includes a large chamber that they line with grass and herbs. Badgers do not hibernate, but sometimes retire to their den for 2-3 weeks at a time during cold spells.

They eat fresh or decayed meat and eggs, and some plant matter. Badgers dig prey out of the ground they detect with their superior senses of scent and hearing. Prey may include ground squirrels, woodchucks and other rodents, and cottontail rabbits.

A female badger will produce on average, 2-3 young, which are born in late April to early June. The mother will continue to feed and care for her young until early autumn when the young disperse.

They are irregular in abundance and distribution throughout state. Records show that there have been observations of badgers throughout the GHRA range. Keep an eye open for these critters, there may be one in your prairie!

Spring Migration at Horicon Marsh

by William K. Volkert
DNR Wildlife Educator/Naturalist

Each year a great number and variety of birds return to this area and the same sequence of bird migration takes place. The birds return to our state in the same order, but the exact date depends on the progress of spring. Between warm and early spring seasons and late seasons, birds may be as much as 3 weeks apart from year to year.

Each group of birds, however, responds to a particular environmental condition, which encourages them on their way. The geese arrive when the snow begins to melt and ducks cannot advance farther than the melting of ice and availability of open water. Woodcocks have to wait until frost is out of the ground so that their food of worms and insect grubs becomes available and most songbirds have to wait until the weather is warm enough to assure a steady supply of insects. Therefore, the annual progress of spring determines the progression of the spring migration.

For those interested in seeing many of our migrant birds as well as learning from experts, the Horicon Marsh Bird Festival is again being held in May. This year, this series of events and activities will be on May 7 through 10. A complete schedule of activities can be found at www.marshmelodies.com.

The following is a brief description of the spring phenology that occurs in this area:

January - While the marsh may be covered in ice and snow, it is not devoid of bird life during the depths of winter. Common winter birds of the marsh include northern harrier, red-tailed and rough-legged hawks, snowy owls (occasional), lapland longspur, snow bunting and horned larks. Canada geese commonly overwinter on the marsh, but depart when deep snow covers the remaining food supply.

February - By the middle of the month, Wisconsin's first "spring" migrant, the horned lark, returns in bigger numbers. Although some remain throughout the winter, they become more abundant in the fields and along the roadsides surrounding the marsh. Canada geese usually return by late February too!

March - Red-winged blackbirds and grackles return following the geese, with the first sandhill cranes returning before the middle of the month. The first arriving robins, song sparrows and killdeer return by mid-March. Mid to late March is usually the time when the ducks begin to show up on the first open water. Coots and pied-billed grebes follow them. As water birds, they cannot advance their migration until the ice melts. Early arriving birds concentrate on the area rivers since the moving water will be the first to break the ice. As the shallow wetlands and finally the lakes open up, the large flocks of ducks become more common.

Great blue herons will often be seen in early to mid-March, but the majority of the birds tend to wait until nearly the end of the month before they return to their rookery at Fourmile and Cotton Islands. Once settled in, they can be seen throughout the day, from April to the end of summer, in the air over Horicon Marsh and the surrounding land. Great egrets stay back for another 2 to 3 weeks, with the majority of the birds arriving in early to mid April.

April - From mid April through the end of May is the peak of activity for most spring migrating birds. With the disappearance of the ice and the warming temperatures, a great variety of birds come streaming into Horicon Marsh. Snipe can be heard over the marsh, while rails, swamp sparrows, yellow-headed blackbirds, black-crowned night herons and many others can be seen on the marsh or heard calling from the stands of cattails. This is also the time when bald eagles, osprey and peregrine falcons are most commonly seen at the marsh.

By the third week of the month the great flocks of Canada geese depart Wisconsin for their northerly nesting grounds along the shores of James and Hudson Bay. Some geese will be seen on the marsh throughout the summer. These are the giant Canada geese, which is a separate subspecies that nests in Wisconsin and other sites across the mid-west. The northerly nesting ducks depart soon after the geese. Local nesting birds are to be seen courting on the marsh just prior to nesting. Once nesting begins in May, waterfowl are less often seen at Horicon Marsh, as the females are on the nest and the males form small flocks in the marsh.

April is also the time when the shorebirds return. Water levels are now low enough to form mudflats and populations can be very abundant at the marsh. During April is also when the first big waves of songbirds come through the area. The tree swallows will be seen first and then the other species returning about 3 weeks later. The first of the warblers, the yellow-rumped, returns in early to mid-April, while the palm, black-throated green, black and white warblers will be seen by late April.

May - After the northern nesting waterfowl have departed the marsh the great flocks of songbirds begin to reach the peak of their migration. From late April to the third week of May is the best time to watch and listen for the spring songbirds. The best time to see them is prior to the full development of the leaves of our forest trees. In some years the leaves may develop before most of the birds even arrive making for a real challenge. Among the great variety of songbirds to be seen at Horicon and many other sites are tanagers, orioles, rose-breasted grosbeaks, vireos and flycatchers. These are known as the passerines [perching birds or songbirds]. Among them are many of the neotropical migrants. These are birds that winter in the tropical rainforests and nest in the forests and grasslands of Wisconsin, surrounding states and Canada.

In May, the remainder of our spring wetland birds also return. This includes the green heron, least bittern, marsh wren and many others. This is also the time when some of our rarest birds can be sighted here. Take a trip to this great place and possibly see little blue herons, snowy egrets, glossy and white-faced ibis and even white pelicans. *

New Faces in the GHRA

Our last newsletter introduced two of our new wildlife technicians to you, Josh Jackl and John Sippl. Josh and John were hired as limited term employees and we are happy to report that they have both gone on to new, more permanent positions. Josh is now working for Pheasants Forever as one of their Habitat Team Specialists for Winnebago County and John is administering the Wetland Reserve Program for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Eau Claire County.

We've found a few new candidates that are going to fit in well with our program. Please welcome our new technicians:

Gabriel Gray ~ *Wildlife Technician LTE-Horicon* **-** Hi, my name is Gabriel Gray. I graduated from Vermilion Community College in Ely, MN in the spring of 2003 with an Associate of Applied Science degree in Natural Resources Technology. In Ely, I participated in numerous wildlife surveys and habitat projects. I was a member of the forestry and wildlife club as well as the Society of American Foresters student chapter. In my free time I like to hunt, fish, hike, and play softball. Since this is my first job related to my degree, I look forward to enhancing my knowledge and experience.

Steve Easterly ~ W*ildlife Technician LTE-Horicon* **-** Hello, my name is Steve Easterly. I graduated from UW-Stevens Point with a B.S. degree in Wildlife Management and a minor in Forestry. While in school I gained a wide variety of experiences from several agencies, including the Wyoming Game and Fish, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the USDA-NRCS. Since graduating I've been working as a Wildlife Technician LTE with the DNR in various locations spending most of my time in the northeast region. I've been primarily working on grassland habitat maintenance and restoration, setting up deer and turkey registration stations, and hunting when there's time. After a short stint with the research folks, working on a waterfowl project in the summer of 2003 I've joined the GHRA team as a Wildlife Tech. in the Horicon office. I'm looking forward to working with new people and gaining new experiences.

Craig Locy ~ ***Wildlife Technician LTE-Oshkosh -*** My name is Craig Locy and I am originally from Neenah, WI. I graduated from Fox Valley Technical College with an Associates Degree in Natural Resources. While attending school I worked with Chronic Wasting Disease sampling, the DNR forester and a surveying firm. Some of my favorites past times are hunting, fishing, and archery. I just joined the GHRA team this spring and am looking forward to working with the program.

Wetland Update

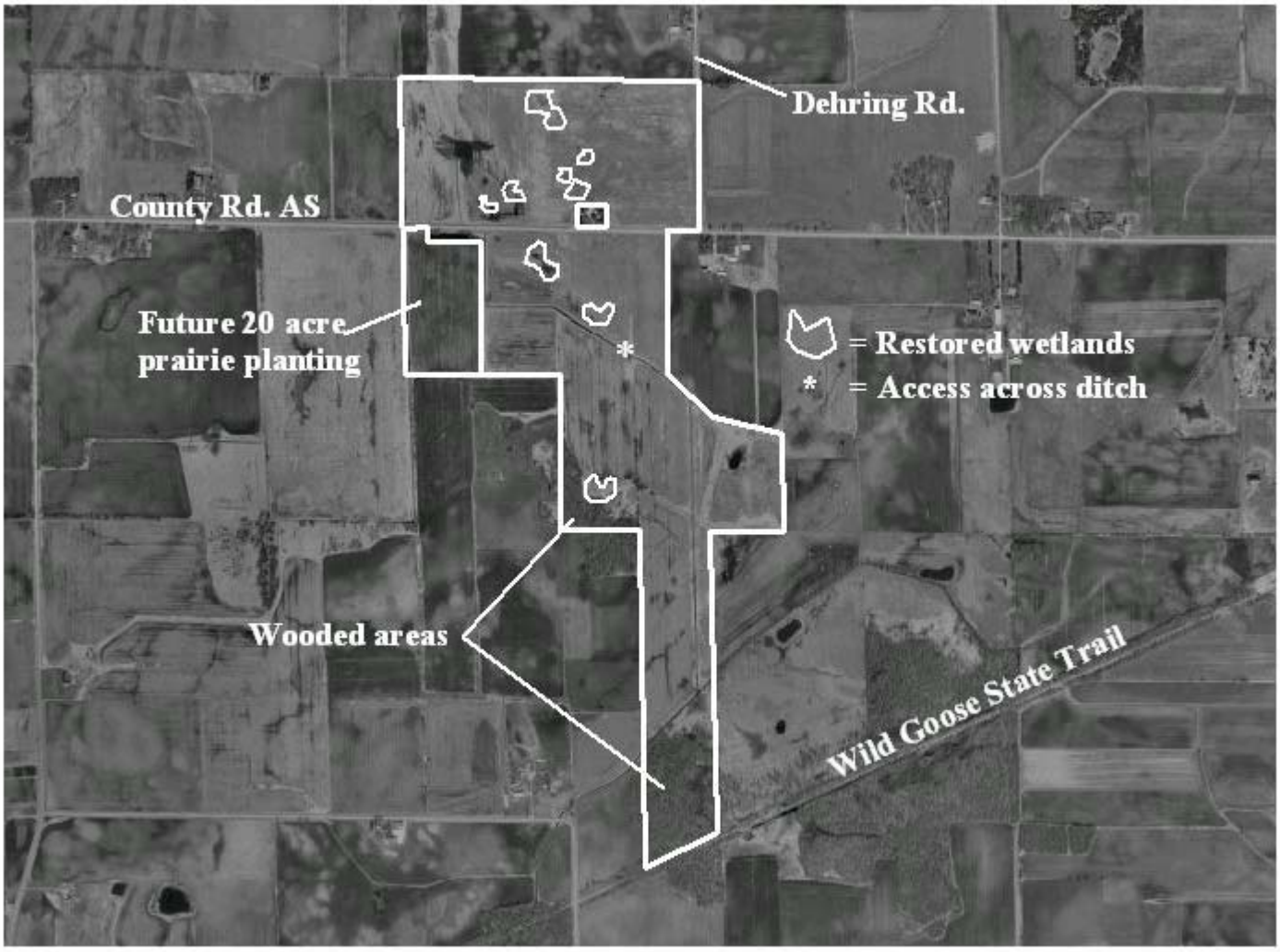
by Angie Rusch, GHRA Wetland Coordinator

The GHRA program received a $85,000 North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant funded through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in the fall of 2002. The funding is aimed at restoring wetlands, which in turn restore the natural hydrology of the area, provide critical waterfowl & wildlife habitat, and protect water quality. Wisconsin has lost over one-half of its original 10-million wetland acres due to drainage efforts, allowing agricultural development to spread into marginal farmland. Without wetlands and grassy expanses, which were common fixtures on the rural landscape in east central Wisconsin during the 1940's, ducks, pheasants, and grassland songbirds, along with an entire community of native grasses, wildflowers, and aquatic plants could not survive.

A common misconception is that wetlands are covered with standing water year-round. This is true in some instances, but in many cases the area is only seasonally saturated. These small, shallow, seasonal or temporary wetlands are critically important for waterfowl, shorebirds, songbirds, pheasants, and many species of furbearers, amphibians, reptiles and insects. These wetlands will warm sooner than deep-water marshes and provide isolation for courtship activities of breeding waterfowl, along with the feeding and nesting habitat necessary for hens to produce and raise a brood. Ducks will nest in adjacent grasslands and feed on insects and plants off the wetland bottom. In addition, these areas provide excellent winter cover for pheasants. Ideally, 4 acres of permanent native grass cover for every 1 acre of wetland is recommended, or a minimum buffer of 100 feet surrounding the restored wetland. Once restored, the wetland community is turned back into a functioning ecosystem.

Since the fall of 2002, 65 acres of wetlands have been restored by means of ditch plugs, tile breaks, dikes and scrapes. Landowners within the project boundary are encouraged to explore the wetland & grassland restoration potentials of their property. Financial assistance is available for lands within the project area, and technical advice is available to all. The grant will be coming to an end this October and anyone who knows of someone interested in the program, should contact myself, Angie Rusch at 920-485-3011.

GHRA Featured Property



Previous Landowners: Marvin and Bernedine Pea, Clarence Pea and Leona Stoppleworth
Location: Oakfield Township, Fond du Lac County
Size: 250 acres

These parcels were purchased in 1995 for the GHRA program. Over the last 8 years, the area has been converted from agriculture fields to a mosaic of native warm season grasses and wetlands.

The last addition to the property was during the summer of 2003, when the three wetland scrapes south of AS were constructed. In the fall, grasses were replanted in the areas surrounding the scrapes. These new additions to the landscape should attract more waterfowl to the property along with other wetland species such as frogs and turtles. Mammal species that will be attracted include deer, mink and muskrat. Take a hike during the upcoming months and you are sure to encounter a nesting mallard, pheasant or even a turkey.

Future plans for this block include a final planting for this property, scheduled for 2004. The area labeled future prairie will be converted to native grasses, which will add an additional 20 acres of habitat to the landscape. Also in the works for the future is to get the brush under control which will include removal of the large cottonwoods. If you visit the property during the upcoming months you will find that DNR staff conducted a large prescribed burn south of AS. The 20 acres that will be planted in the upcoming months was burned as a site preparation for planting and the area to the east was burned to control the encroaching woody vegetation.

FUN ZONE: Find the following words associated with a Wisconsin Prairie:

BADGER	BERGAMOT	BIG BLUESTEM	BOBOLINK	BOXELDER
BUR OAK	CONEFLOWER	GHRA	GRASSLAND	MALLARD
MEADOWLARK	PHEASANT	PRAIRIE	PRESCRIBED BURN	REMNANT
	SCRAPE	SEED	WETLAND	

Z	K	M	E	A	D	O	W	L	A	R	K	F	H
D	O	T	G	V	B	N	M	T	P	D	O	Q	T
D	N	A	L	S	S	A	R	G	R	P	L	U	B
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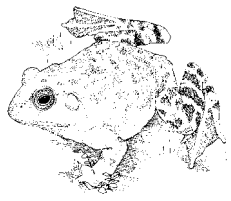
O	J	D	B	O	B	O	L	I	N	K	F	Q	U

The highway will kill you?

Well maybe not you, but if you are a frog or turtle or even a duck or goose, crossing from one side of the road to the other, a highway can pose a dangerous threat. Since spring has sprung and summer is almost here, critters are on the move, especially in places around Horicon Marsh where Highways 28 and 49 dissect a portion of the marsh.

What can you do? Give these creatures a break, drive slowly and be on the lookout to avoid hitting them as they cross the roadways.

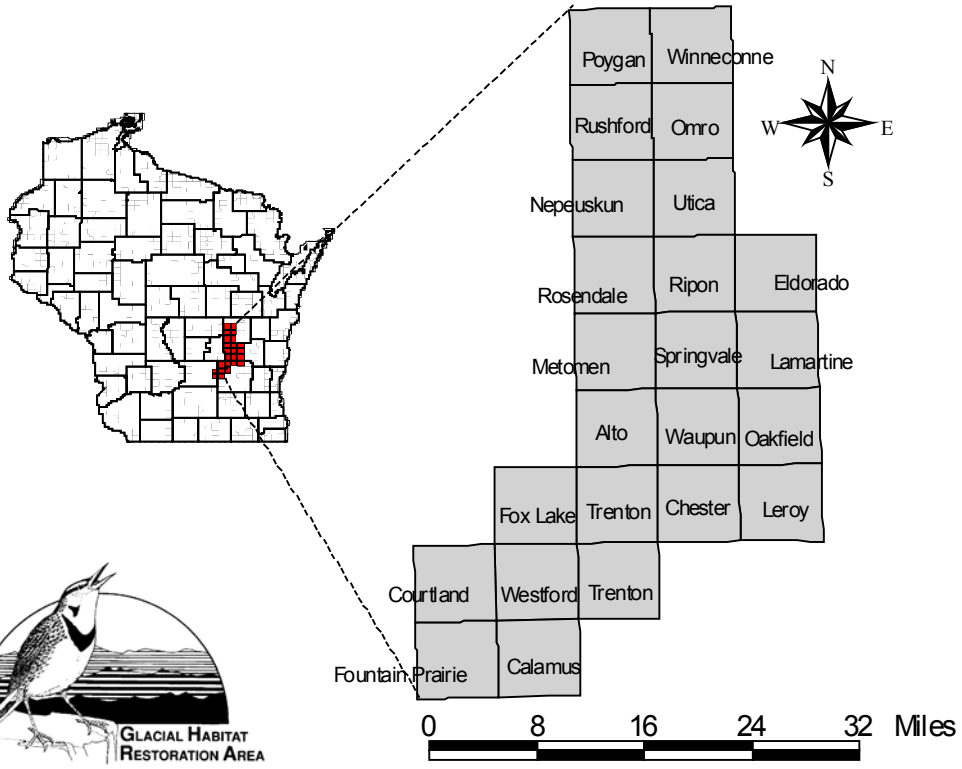


Spring burn season is underway.

We lit the torch to begin the 2004 spring burn season on April 1st. As conditions allow, we will be busy taking care of 1,754 acres on 56 properties. Maybe your easement is scheduled for a burn this spring, if so, last fall, staff mowed a firebreak around the perimeter of the area that we intend to burn.

Why conduct prescribed burns? It is our way of accomplishing many management objectives. It aids in rejuvenating the prairie or by controlling encroaching woody vegetation. Typically, grassland habitat is burned every 3-5 years to try and mimic the fires that swept through this area hundreds of years ago. Since we are dependent on current environmental conditions, in particular wind direction and intensity, we typically are not able to decide which property will be burned until the morning of the burn. As a result, it is difficult for us to contact you prior to conducting the burn, as many of you are not available at the time of day that the decision is made. The old rule applies here, where there's smoke there's fire, but in this case, fire is a good thing and just your local GHRA staff doing what's best for the prairie.

Glacial Habitat Restoration Area and Staff



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